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KENNEDY ATTEMPTS TO WIN NASSER

A THOUSAND DAYS, by Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. 912 pp., index, (Andre Deutsch) 55s.
KENNEDY, by Theodore C. Sorenson 783 pp. index (Hodder & Stoughton) 63s.

Schlesinger's recollection of Kennedy at the White House is about the same length as Sorenson's, but it is handier, more readable and rather more politically-minded. The account of Kennedy's attempt to come to terms with Nasser, mentioned by both authors is a good test.

Sorenson gives it two sentences. Economic aid, he says, helped Kennedy "to persuade Nasser to hold back anti-Israel fanatics in the Arab League." He also tells us that Nasser liked John Badeau, Kennedy's envoy in Cairo, that Kennedy put off inviting Nasser to Washington for fear of the Israel lobby in the U.S., and that Macmillan was "violently angry" when he thought that the U.S. offer of Hawk missiles to Israel "had displaced a British sale." So much for Sorenson on Kennedy's Middle Eastern policy.

Schlesinger is more forthcoming; he devotes some two pages to Nasser, and a number more to Kennedy's attitude towards Africa—and especially to Ben Bella's admiration for Kennedy.

Kennedy, says Schlesinger, wanted to reach an understanding with Nasser but "Nasser's dreams of empire presented an obstacle." "Kennedy believed strongly in

America's moral commitment to Israeli security and took steps to strengthen Israel's ability to resist aggression." But Schlesinger is inclined to overrate the effect of Kennedy's personal letters to Nasser on his subsequent policy. And it is a pity that Mr. Schlesinger does not tell us something about the undertaking which Nasser gave to Kennedy not to make the Jordan waters a cause for an Arab war against Israel.

The Yemen war is treated rather lightly as "Komer's war", and neither Schlesinger nor Sorenson make any real attempt to explain the American failure to get to grips with the Middle Eastern world—except, of course, when policy matters were left in the care of the C.I.A. At least, as Schlesinger shows, the C.I.A. knew what it wanted—and how to get it.

Both books are disappointing and superficial in many ways, but for all that they are indispensable reading for anyone who wants to understand the workings of the policy-makers in the White House. They present an interesting, even fascinating backstage view of American Government at work. It is not an altogether reassuring experience. J.K.

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editor